NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Ave., N. Y.*

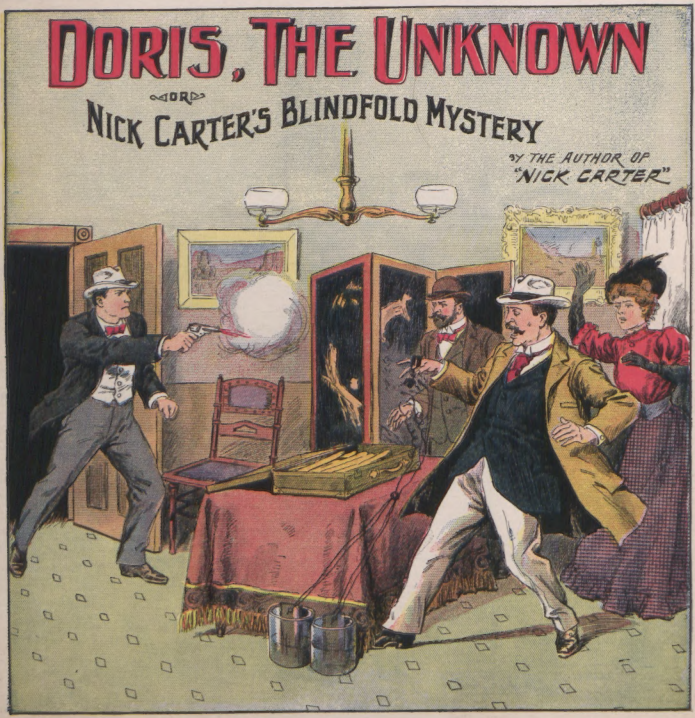
No. 517 NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 24, 1906. **Price, Five Cents**

DORIS, THE UNKNOWN

OR

NICK CARTER'S BLINDFOLD MYSTERY

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"



The answer was a flash and a report, apparently from Nick Carter's sleeve, and a yell of rage and pain from the baronet.

NICK CARTER

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DORIS, THE UNKNOWN

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NICK CARTER'S BLINDFOLD MYSTERY.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A MYSTERY OF THE STORM.

Nick Carter came to a sudden halt in his struggles, bent his head forward, and listened.

The time lacked but a few moments of midnight of the tenth of March. The wind was blowing with a force which a sailor would have described as a whole gale, and the snow—little, fine, dry particles of snow they were—was falling so thickly and so fast that all human vision was blinded as effectually as if an opaque cloud had been thrown over the head of each pedestrian.

That term "each pedestrian" is at fault, however, for, although the detective had already toiled through the gale and the snow for more than a mile, he had not encountered another person abroad on the streets.

The storm had developed into a veritable blizzard which bore more resemblance to that famous one of March, 1888, than any storm that Nick Carter had seen since that time.

Electric lights, that were more than twenty feet distant, succeeded in making nothing more than a blur through the utter blackness of the night.

It was impossible to see at all, and to force oneself against the violence of the wind was next thing to an impossibility.

The sharp blasts of the gale, which came hurtling up the street laden with their burdens of fine snow, took away the breath, filled eyes and nostrils—and the mouth if one chanced to open it—with tingling pain, and with a sense of helplessness.

Nick Carter was walking to his home because he had discovered that there was no other way to get there.

There was not a surface-car or an elevated-train moving in the city, and for some reason, which the detective had not discovered, even the subway was closed and silent.

Cabs or conveyances of any sort, there were none.

Heavily laden trucks, bakers' wagons, butchers' wagons, vehicles of all sorts, had been abandoned in the streets—and on the morning after the storm—if we may anticipate this one fact in order to convey an adequate

idea of its fury—there were many bodies found of men and women, boys and girls, who had fallen exhausted in the streets, some of them quite near to their own homes; fallen never to rise again.

Nick Carter had just arrived in New York after an absence of three weeks. He had come in via the Pennsylvania Railroad, and that, too, on the very last train that had succeeded in getting through to the station in Jersey City; and so we see that he had toiled on foot all the way from Cortlandt Street because that happened to be the only one of the many ferries of that company in operation that terrible night.

Nick was the only one among all the passengers who had dared to brave the storm alone; the others had either remained in the ferry-house, or had sought shelter at some near-by resort or place, there to wait until morning.

And it is doubtful if any one who possessed less strength and endurance than the detective could have made his way at all against the fury of that blizzard.

Indeed, only Nick's absolute familiarity with the streets of the city made it possible for him to find his way.

The impenetrable blackness of the night and the almost compact thickness of the driving snow made the electric lights shine with no more brilliancy than glow-worms in the ditches beside a country road on a rainy night.

There was no sky-line; the tops of buildings could not be seen.

The only way in which he could tell when he arrived at the corner of a street, was by a sudden cross-violence of the gale as it drew down through another thoroughfare.

But he had toiled onward through it all with dogged perseverance and undaunted courage, counting the streets and naming them to himself as best he could when he passed.

And so he had worked his way through Cortlandt Street to Broadway; thence up Broadway to Astor Place; thence to Fourth Avenue, because Fourth Avenue is a wider street than Broadway, because the buildings along it are not so high, and, therefore, because he believed that he would thus encounter a lesser violence of the gale.

At Twenty-third Street he turned toward Madison Square and at the corner of the Metropolitan Life Building he turned northward again upon Madison Avenue and so arrived—he believed he had, for he could see nothing—at the corner of Twenty-fourth Street.

During his long and tedious struggle he had many times come upon bare stretches of pavement where the gale had swept it clean of every particle of snow, and at other times he had encountered deep drifts which were almost impassable.

And here at this particular corner the snow was piled and packed solidly almost shoulder high.

He knew—or thought he knew—that Madison Square was opposite him and that he could gain nothing by attempting to go around the drift, and so he began to fight his way through it, using his arms, and hands, and legs, and feet in the effort to clear a way for his passage, and now and then pausing to put a handful of the snow in his mouth, for his lips and tongue were parched and dry from the exertions he had already made.

He was half-way across the street—he thought—when he suddenly ceased his struggles, as explained in the first sentence of this chapter.

One long, shrill, piercing scream, which volumned high above the roaring of the gale, came to his ears from the direction of the square.

A woman's scream it was. A scream of agony, of terror, of pain, and of horror.

Not such a scream as a woman would utter if merely lost in the snow, and in danger of death by freezing or smothering; but a scream of sudden pain and terror.

The detective paused, bent his head, and listened; but there came no second cry.

He was in the middle of the drift; up to his armpits in the snow, and he was almost exhausted.

For a moment he hesitated.

Straight ahead of him, only a few blocks distant now, was his home; but across the avenue, through drifts even higher than the one he was toiling against, somewhere in the square he believed his duty led him.

There was no repetition of the cry.

Save for the storm that roared about him there came no further sound.

He parted his lips to call out in response to the scream, but he closed them again resolutely.

Then, with a sigh, he turned so that he faced the direction from which the sound had come, and with renewed energy he tore away at the drifts that confronted him and began to make his way across the avenue toward the square.

Reader, if you have ever toiled against a drift of fine, dry snow with only your hands and feet to aid you, you will know something of what he encountered then, and something about the speed he made.

If you covered a yard in each minute of time, you did exceedingly well.

Nor could the detective determine when he had crossed the avenue, or when he entered upon the square itself. There was no way of telling. The packed snow—packed by the wind—left no traces of curbstone, and it was only when he came face to face with the trunk of a tree after a full half-hour of toil that he knew he was in the park.

"It is worse than looking for a needle in a haymow," he muttered to himself. "In all this wild waste of snow where shall I hope to find the woman who screamed?"

He leaned against the tree for a moment, and then he seated himself in the snow with his back against it.

Rest was absolutely essential to him just then, unless

he condemned himself to be among the number who were destined to be found the next day, stark and stiff and dead from the exposure of the night.

He rested, and he ate snow—and he listened; and the snow gradually covered his body with a sheet of white while a sense of lethargy began to steal over him—the lethargy of exhaustion.

But he started to his feet again and shook the snow from him as best he could.

"Shall I look farther?" he asked himself. "Will there be any use in doing so? Can I hope to find that woman who screamed, even if she is lying dead or unconscious somewhere near here? I think that I am somewhere in Madison Square, but really I could not swear to it; and if I am in the square, I have no idea how far I have penetrated into it.

"If I attempt to go farther and do not turn back now while I still know the direction I should take, I may lose all sense of direction and be lost myself."

He knew the seriousness of his position; he realized fully his danger—and he had never faced a greater one even when bullets were flying, or knives gleaming, or fire raging.

But it was not in Nick Carter's nature to give up when once he had started upon a duty to be performed.

Once he did turn his face toward the avenue again, but he resolutely turned it back again and as resolutely resumed his toil through the snow-drifts.

Another fifteen or twenty minutes elapsed and he was in the midst of a drift that was higher and bigger than any he had encountered till then; so high and big and becoming with each step still higher and bigger that he halted, knowing that he could not get through it and must either turn back or else try to make his way around it somehow.

And then, while he was deciding which of these two things he should attempt, he heard voices—two of them—from beyond the drift; from the opposite side of it if there was one, or from the midst of it if there were not.

"I cannot go another step, Jim," said one of them. "I'm plum played out."

It was the voice of a man, a voice of refinement—evidently the voice of a young man; and the other one replied in heavy, somewhat sullen tones.

"Get behind me then, kid. Hang onto my coat tails. I will pull you through. After this night's work——"

"My God! This night's work!"

"Shut up, curse you! Save your breath. You'll need it all in getting away from here."

"But Doris—will she——"

"Shut up, I tell you. If I hear another word out of you I'll leave you here. Doris is all right. She will be found dead in the——"

The two had started on again. A sudden accession in the fury of the gale drowned the succeeding words that Nick Carter, up to his chin in the snow, had overheard.

But if he had been undecided what course to take a moment before, he was no longer in any doubt.

He forgot the seriousness of his position; he thought no more of the dangers by which he was surrounded; he did not even consider the advantage of attempting to go around the drift, but he attacked it with all his strength and so fought his way through it inch by inch, and presently came out upon a place where the wind had swept the walk clean and dry.

Before him, behind him, at the right and at the left were high drifts, and he plunged into the one at the right, at random.

Somewhere near him he knew that a woman was lying unconscious or dead.

Twenty feet, thirty feet, forty feet more he struggled on, and then he tripped upon something and pitched head foremost into the snow.

But he struggled to his feet again and reached down with his hands. Then he uttered an exclamation of pleasure.

He had found her.

CHAPTER II.

DORIS, THE UNKNOWN.

In a moment Nick Carter had brushed away the covering of snow from the silent body, and then he knelt down and pressed his ear against her left side under the arm and toward the back.

"The heart is still beating," he murmured, "but it is very faint."

In one of his pockets was a small flask which held about a gill of brandy, and he poured a few drops of the contents between her lips.

There was no response other than a faint sigh, but it satisfied him that there was still a chance that she might live, provided there were no wounds upon her; and he could not find one in that hasty and cursory examination he made then.

He returned the flask to his pocket and brought forth his electric lantern; and when he pressed the button and threw the flash of white light into the young woman's face, he was startled both by her youth and her beauty.

But there was no time to give heed to such things then, for he knew that she would die if he did not quickly get her to some place of comparative safety.

The storm seemed to have increased in fury; the drifts were piling higher and higher all around him, but, nevertheless, he lifted the body in his arms and began to struggle onward, again turning his face in the direction which would ultimately lead him to his home.

We will not toil through that terrible ordeal with him.

Nick Carter himself could never fully understand how

he succeeded in getting there with the burden he carried.

It was a struggle for life against overwhelming odds; a fight for inches of distance.

But inches lengthen into feet, and feet into yards, just as pennies make dollars; and at last, panting, almost exhausted, he staggered up the steps of his own house and pressed the electric button beside the door; and when Joseph opened it, he almost fell into his arms.

The time, as he afterward discovered, was a quarter-past three in the morning. It had been midnight when he heard the scream of terror proceeding from the square; it had been half-past eight in the evening when he left the ferry-house.

He had been seven and a quarter hours exposed to the fury of the blizzard; seven and a quarter hours in covering the distance from the ferry to his home; and supposing it to have been approximately one o'clock when he found the unconscious body of the young woman, he had been two hours or more in carrying her the few short blocks from Madison Square to his home.

His housekeeper and one of the maids were called from their beds, and together they worked unceasingly over the poor girl he had brought with him, while in another part of the house his three assistants took turns in rubbing the life back into their chief.

But it was done at last, and Nick, none the worse for his terrible struggle, went to the door of the room where the housekeeper and maid were working over the girl.

"I would like to come in when I may," he called through the door.

A moment later he was admitted, and he found that his servants had placed her in the bed where she was sleeping quietly, and was apparently none the worse for her terrible experience.

"Did she recover consciousness?" asked Nick, of the housekeeper.

"Yes—and no," was the reply. "She opened her eyes and murmured a name, after which she immediately closed them again, and fell into the attitude of sleeping quietly. I thought it best not to attempt to rouse her again."

"Quite right. What was the name she uttered?"

"It was Agnes."

"Was that all she said?"

"Yes; that name and nothing more. Do you know who she is, sir?"

"No; save that her name is Doris, I know nothing whatever about her. Tell me, are there any marks of violence on her body?"

"Her wrists are bruised as if somebody had held her by them again her will. There is a large black-and-blue spot under her left breast, as if she had received a severe blow—as if a man had struck her there with his fist; that is all."

"No wounds of any sort?"

"No, sir."

"How old is she, do you think, Jannette?"

"She is very young, sir. Eighteen, I should say. Possibly twenty."

"She is a beautiful girl," said Nick, looking down upon her again.

"She is very beautiful, sir. She is like an angel. You found her in the snow?"

"Yes. I will ask you to stay by her and watch over her, Jannette. As soon as it is possible I will send around for Doctor Stag, although it is doubtful if the old chap could get here now."

"I will remain with her, sir."

"Thank you. I am about done up myself, and I will turn in for a few hours of rest. I believe our patient is out of immediate danger, don't you?"

"Yes, sir. I think she will be all right when she recovers from the shock of her adventure. She was not frozen at all."

The detective slept like a log until half-past eight o'clock that morning, at which time he rose, had his breakfast, and then inquired for the young woman he had rescued.

"It is very strange, sir," said the housekeeper. "She is precisely in the condition in which you left her when you went to your room."

"Sleeping?"

"It is something more than mere sleep, sir. It is more like a stupor."

"She breathes regularly?"

"Yes, sir; but it is impossible to rouse her at all. The only response I get from her, if I try, is a moan as if she were in pain. I think a doctor should see her without delay."

The detective returned to his study where he found Chick.

"Do you think you could fight your way around to Doctor Stag's?" he inquired of his assistant.

"I can make a pretty good stagger at it," was the reply.

"I wish you would do it. Bring Stag back here with you if you have to carry him. I don't want that girl to die if it can be avoided."

"Have you tried to look out at the front windows yet?" asked Chick.

"No; I haven't," replied the detective.

"Go to the front of the house and take a look. The snow is piled from the middle of the street to the sills of our second-story windows; the opposite side of the street is almost bare. Patsy and Ten-Ichi have dug a tunnel through from the basement door to the street, so I will take them, and some shovels with me when I go after Stag. It is more than likely that we will have to dig him out."

"All right. Dig him out, then; but go at once."

Nevertheless, it was fully two hours later before Doctor Stag arrived at the detective's house; and when, an hour after that he entered the detective's study and lighted a cigar, he appeared silent and perplexed.

"Well?" said Nick. "What is the matter with your patient, doctor?"

"I'm blowed if I know," was the reply.

"Eh? You don't know?"

"Frankly I do not."

"Tell me about her."

"There is nothing to tell, Nick, save that she is in a sort of stupor which is entirely unnatural, and which I cannot explain at all, from the history of the case."

"Possibly it is merely a sleep of utter exhaustion."

"No. It is not that."

"From the effects of a drug, then."

"Nor that. The effect of any drug I know anything about—any drug that would not have killed her—would have worn off by this time; partially, at least."

"Jannette told me that there is a severe bruise on her body, over the heart, or nearly so. Is it possible that her condition might have been produced by that? Or, rather, by the blow that made the bruise?"

"I have examined that. No; I do not think so."

"Then what——"

"It's a puzzle, Nick. I'm going to trespass on your hospitality for a time, and watch her. I confess that the case interests me."

"Trespass! I like that!"

"What I mean is that there is not any likelihood that I will receive calls at my office this morning, and I certainly shall not attempt to make any until the streets are cleared of snow, so being here, I shall remain—for a time, at least."

"Good!"

"You might give me a little better understanding of the history of the case," said the doctor.

The detective described, then, his toil through the storm up to the point when he arrived, he thought, at the corner of Twenty-fourth Street and Madison Avenue.

"The time lacked, I think, a few minutes of midnight," he continued, "when I arrived at the corner and was startled by hearing a woman, or a girl, scream, somewhere over in the park.

"Of course, I couldn't hurry to her, but I got there about as soon as it could have been done, and——"

"How long do you suppose it was from the time you heard the scream until you found her in the snow?" asked the doctor.

"I should say that it was all of an hour; possibly a little more than that."

"And how long was it from that time until you got her here to your home?"

"At least two hours more."

"So that after she screamed she underwent, at least, three hours more of exposure."

"Yes."

"And nobody knows how long a time she had been exposed to the storm before that."

"No."

"Is that all you know about it, Nick?"

"I chafed her hands a little and spatted her face somewhat, when I found her; and I poured perhaps a tablespoonful of brandy into her."

"Anything else?"

"Oh, I pounded her and rubbed her once in the while when I was bringing her here. After that my housekeeper and the maid attended to her."

"I wonder where she got that bruise? And I wonder who could have nearly ground the skin from her wrists in some sort of a struggle?" said the doctor.

"I forgot to tell you," said the detective, "that while I was anchored in the snow so fast that I wasn't sure that I could get out, just a few minutes before I discovered her, I heard the voices of two men talking at the opposite side of the drift."

"Oho! What did they have to say?"

"Nothing very particular save that I gathered from it that they had abandoned a woman to the fury of the storm. One of them said that she would be found dead in the morning, and, because of the manner in which he said it, I gathered that he was not sorry that it would be so."

"But he did not give the impression that he—or they, rather—had done anything to assist the storm a little in its deadly work? Eh?"

"Yes. I did get that impression. It was intensified, too, by the scream I had heard."

"When you searched for the woman, then, you expected to find that she had been stabbed, or something like it, didn't you?"

"I did."

"I suppose you made no effort to get at the men, when you heard them talking?"

"My dear doctor, situated as I was, I could not have got at them with a locomotive. They were on the opposite side of the drift from me."

CHAPTER III.

A GIRL WITHOUT A PAST.

It was late that afternoon when Doris awoke to consciousness—or, to be correct, to a condition which was at first supposed to be consciousness.

She opened her eyes, smiled and looked up into the face of Jannette, who was bending over her; and she said:

"Where am I?"

"You are with friends," replied Jannette; and then she

hurried away to call Nick and the doctor, who had gone to his office and returned in the interim since morning.

When Nick entered the room, he went directly to the bedside, and, lifting her hand, he stroked it gently as he asked:

"Well, Miss Doris, how are you feeling now?"

"Quite well, I thank you," she replied. "Please tell me where I am?"

"You are in my home. I brought you here very late last night, when I rescued you from the storm, you know."

"The storm? What storm?"

"Don't you remember the storm, Doris?"

"No; I do not remember any storm. And why do you call me Doris?"

"Isn't that your name, child? Isn't your name Doris?"

"N-no. That is, I don't know. What *is* my name?"

"I supposed it was Doris. Isn't that right?"

"I don't know. I don't remember;" and she looked greatly perplexed.

"Do you know anybody by the name of Jim?" he asked, as deeply perplexed as she appeared to be.

She shook her head negatively.

"Or anybody who is called Kid?"

"No," she said.

"While you were only half-conscious, you called upon somebody by the name of Agnes. Who is Agnes? Can you tell me that?"

Again she shook her head.

"No," she said. "I don't seem to remember anybody by that name."

"Don't you remember anything about the terrible storm last night, Doris?"

"No. Was there a storm?"

"A terrible storm. You were out in it. Somehow you got as far as Madison Square Park, and while you were there something frightened you so that you screamed out. Do you remember anything about that?"

"No," she said again.

"Don't you remember who you were with?"

"No. Everything seems to be a blank. I don't even know who I am. It is all very strange, isn't it? What has happened?"

"I don't know yet, Doris. I shall call you that for the present, for want of a better name and because I think it is really your own. You will remember it after a little."

"Perhaps. I hope so."

"Can't you remember where you lived?"

"No, sir. I don't seem to remember anything at all."

"Don't you recall anything that happened to you yesterday?"

"I do not even remember that there was a yesterday, sir."

"Nor father, nor mother, nor sister, nor brother? Haven't you any of these?"

She shook her head; and then the doctor stepped forward.

Until now he had been listening, but now he pressed Nick's arm as a suggestion that he would like to ask a few questions, so the detective said to her:

"Doris, this is the doctor who has been caring for you since I brought you here. His name is Doctor Stag. He would like to ask you a few questions."

"Shall I call you Doris, also?" asked the doctor, drawing a chair up beside the bed and seating himself upon it.

"If you like," she replied indifferently. "I don't seem to remember what my name is, and so I suppose that one will do as well as another."

"Can't you recall any name at all that is familiar to you, Doris?"

"No, sir."

"Are you in pain, anywhere?"

"No, sir."

"Does your head feel badly, at all?"

"No, sir."

"Or your back? Or your limbs?"

"No, sir; only that I am very tired, I think."

"Yes; you are tired. I know that; and you shall lie here and rest and have the best of care, just as long a time as you care to do so. Shall I tell you something about what happened to you?"

"Please."

"Mr. Carter found you unconscious in the snow, in Madison Square, late last night. He brought you here in his arms, and this good woman, who stands at the opposite side of the room, undressed you and put you to bed. Once, when they were getting you ready for bed, you opened your eyes and called for Agnes. What Agnes was it, Doris?"

She shook her head again.

"I do not know," she replied. "I have no idea who it could have been."

"Have you a mother, Doris?"

"A mother? No; I don't think I have a mother. I don't remember."

"Have you a father?"

"No."

"Then you *do* remember that you have no father, do you?"

"I don't know. I don't think I have a father. I don't seem to know anything at all, or to remember anything at all. Oh, what *can* be the matter, doctor?"

"Hush, child. You must not be alarmed, because whatever happens, you are among friends who will care for you tenderly. And, besides, after a little you will remember. The shock of the storm has been too severe for you. How old are you, Doris?"

Her face brightened instantly, and she smiled.

"Oh, I remember that!" she cried out. "I am eighteen. It was my birthday, and——"

She paused and a frown spread over her face; then she added:

"But was it my birthday? I am not sure. Perhaps it was somebody else's."

"Was there a party, Doris? Do you remember that?"

"No, sir. I don't remember at all. I seem to have just been born."

"You remember New York City, do you not?"

"New York City? Yes, I seem to remember that. But New York City is a long way from here, is it not?"

"No; this is New York City. Isn't New York the place where you live, my child?"

"I don't think so, sir. I don't know."

"Have you ever heard of Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Denver, Detroit, St. Louis, Kansas City, New Orleans? Have you ever heard of any of those places?"

"I don't know. They seem to sound familiar to me; and yet—I don't know."

The doctor motioned to Jannette to come nearer.

"Now, Doris," he said, "this is Jannette. She will give you a bowl of broth which I wish you to drink, and after that she will give you some medicine which I wish you to take. When you have taken the medicine, I want you to try to sleep, and when you awaken again I will be here to talk more with you. Will you be a good girl and do all that I ask?"

"Yes, sir," she replied.

The doctor took Nick by the arm then and led him away, and together they went to the detective's study.

"What does it mean, doctor?" asked Nick, with some impatience.

The physician shook his head.

"You will have to ask me something easier," he said. "If she were not so young—if there were more guile and less innocence in her face and manner, and, in short, if the circumstances were not exactly what they are, I should say that she is a fake."

"You mean you suspect that she may be purposely deceiving us?"

"Yes."

"I can't believe that, Stag."

"Neither can I; and yet, I can't explain the condition in any other manner."

"Humph!" said Nick.

"If that body-blow she received had fallen on her head, now, or if——"

"But it didn't."

"No."

"Have you examined her head to see if a blow did fall there, doctor?"

"No."

"Don't you think it would be a good idea?"

"An unnecessary one, Nick."

"Why?"

"Because if she had received a blow on the head of sufficient force to have produced the condition into which she appears to be plunged now, that same blow would have brought about a state of coma—she could not have talked to us as she has, and, no doubt, part of her body would have been paralyzed, as well."

"Well, then, isn't there some sort of a drug which, being administered to her, might have resulted in her present condition?"

"None that I know about. If that one-time poisoner, Codman, were alive now, we might possibly look upon Doris as one of his victims, but——"

"But he is not alive."

"No."

"All the same, Stag, there may be others."

"Eh?"

"There may be others, I say."

"I don't quite understand what you mean, Nick."

"I mean this: You admit that if Codman were alive and in the city, you would not then say unreservedly that this condition is *not* due to a drug, so I say that it is possible that there are others, or, at least, one other, who knows just as much about drugs and poisons as Codman, the poisoner, ever did."

"I doubt it," said the doctor, shaking his head.

"There is his sister. She is alive yet."

"True enough; but she——"

"We do not know the least thing in the world about her, doctor. We don't know how much she knows or how much she doesn't know; but she was Codman's sister, and she is alive."

"Do you mean to suggest, Nick, that you think that Jane Gore—that was her name, I believe—is responsible for the condition in which we find this girl?"

"Certainly not. What I do mean to say is that I don't believe that Doris is faking; that I do believe that it is possible for somebody else to know as much about delicate poisons as Codman knew, and that I believe you will ultimately discover that the girl has swallowed some drug, or that one has been administered to her hypodermically, which has brought about her present condition."

"I cannot believe that she is faking, either, Nick; and yet——"

"And yet, like all doctors, just because you don't happen to know what it is, you fall back upon the first excuse you can hit upon for not knowing."

"That is a little rough, isn't it, Nick?"

"Perhaps so; but you'll never make me believe that Doris is faking."

CHAPTER IV.

THE MAGIC OF A NAME.

It now becomes necessary to pass over a period of six weeks, and to refer but lightly to a few incidents that occurred during that time.

For one thing, during that first day when Doris was a guest in Nick Carter's house, the detective occupied the time, while she was sleeping, to make his way through the snow and to find as nearly as possible the point where he had discovered Doris the night before.

To locate this spot exactly was out of the question, and yet, by starting at the corner where he had first been attracted by her screaming, and going from there over the same course he had taken in the dark, as nearly as he could remember it, he thought that he was not far wrong.

Of course, there was not the slightest trace left there of his presence, or of hers; but, nevertheless, he dug around the spot in the snow, hoping against hope that he would discover something.

He had his labor for his pains, however; but, after that, each day and sometimes two or three times a day, he went to the square and searched over and over again.

And this habit he continued until there came a thaw and the snow had almost entirely disappeared.

"The spot should have a fascination for those two men who left Doris there," he told his first assistant one day, "and so I think you had better spend your days around there, Chick, until I call you off. All you will have to do is to watch for results. I cannot give you any description of either of those men—that is, no more than their voices told me."

"What did their voices tell you?"

"I think that one of them is a big fellow, and the other not so large. The big man goes by the name of Jim; and he called the other fellow Kid. Jim's voice is deep and rather gruff, and the kid's voice is low and refined."

And so it happened that Chick kept watch in the park during two of the six weeks—and did it entirely without result.

The clothing worn by Doris that night of her narrow escape from death afforded them no information whatever.

There were no laundry-marks upon it; no marks of any kind, in fact, notwithstanding that every separate article she had worn was of expensive material, and of the latest and most approved fashion.

They had found no article of jewelry about her; no purse; no money at all.

The detective, during those six weeks, watched the personal column in the *Herald* with the idea if Doris were missing from her home, some one might advertise for her; but he watched it without results. And for some reason, which he did not undertake to explain to himself, he did not advertise her name. He felt that it would be as well if those two men, who had abandoned her in the square, should believe her to be dead.

During the six weeks the condition of Doris had not changed.

She recovered her strength and health, and went about the house apparently in her right mind, and yet, her memory was an utter blank so far as any recollection of the past was concerned.

She recalled everything that took place in Nick Carter's house from the moment of her awakening, without effort. Her memory seemed to be not at all at fault in that particular; but, beyond and behind that incident, she remembered nothing at all.

She assented to the name of Doris, and finally went so far as to say that it must really be her name, since no other had quite the familiar sound to her that that one did; but she could not remember any other name.

Doctor Stag saw her daily. He brought other physicians to see her and to help him study her; but always they went away shaking their heads, and in the privacy of their own offices told each other that there could be but one explanation of the phenomenon, and that was that it was no phenomenon at all—unless it might be called phenomenal acting; wonderful power of dissimulation; a fake.

They suggested as much over and over again to Nick Carter, but he would have none of it.

Once, however, he went so far to please the physicians, that he put the question squarely to Doris herself.

"Doris," he said, "do you know what the doctors are saying about you?"

"No," she replied. "What is it?"

"Some of them insist that you are a fake."

"A fake? What is that? I mean, what does it mean in my case?"

"It means that some of the doctors, who have been here to see you, believe that you are deceiving them when you say that you do not remember."

"Do you mean that some of the doctors think that I have lied to them?"

"Yes."

"Does Doctor Stag think that?"

"No; I don't think he does—now. He had that idea at first, but he has abandoned it."

"Do *you* believe that of me, Mr. Carter?"

"No, Doris, I do not."

"Thank you. I hope you will not ask me to see any more doctors, please; nor to see again any of those who think that I have lied to them. Of course, I will do as you direct, but it would grieve me. If they only knew how hard I try to remember who I am and where I belong; if they knew——"

She burst into tears, and Nick had to comfort her.

"There, Doris," he said. "Don't let it worry you. You shall remain here as my daughter, until you do remember,

and from now on you shall be Doris Carter until we know what your right name is."

"But suppose I never do know? Suppose I never find out what my right name is?"

"Then, Doris, you shall be Doris Carter always. You shall be my daughter for the rest of your life."

And so that conversation had come to an end.

The weather, after the blizzard, was fine.

When the effects of the storm had been cleared away, a long period of warm days made the air almost like September, and within a week after the storm not a vestige of snow remained to be seen in the city.

Nick, who happened not to be busy at this time, the only cases on hand being minor ones which he preferred to leave to the care of his assistants, spent much of his time in going about the city in his automobile, or driving his favorite horse, or walking, and always he was particular to take Doris with him in the hope that she would recognize some landmark, or a face they encountered, or something.

But such a hope was never realized.

She gazed upon the streets and the buildings they passed, exactly as one who had never seen them before. She looked upon the faces of all persons they met, as upon the faces of total strangers.

He took her to such theaters as were producing plays that had been running since the opening of the season, and each time he asked her if she had seen that particular play before; but each time she answered that she had not.

"It seems to me that I have seen nothing that I ever saw before," she replied to him on one of those occasions, "and yet, with it all, it also seems as if I *should* know about things. I know that I *have* a past which I should recall, but I cannot tell where or when."

He took her to dine at Sherry's, at Delmonico's, at the Waldorf, and at other places; she observed nothing that she recognized at any of these places.

Always, on such occasions, he not only watched her narrowly, but he also kept himself on the alert to watch the people who surrounded them, in the hope that he would encounter a pair of eyes somewhere that had recognized her.

He conducted her to the fashionable churches—she seemed to be especially fond of attending church—and he watched her in such places as he did in the restaurants. There was never any result.

He studied her carefully at such times, and he speedily found that at the Episcopalian service she not only readily found her places in the prayer-book, but that when they remained and partook of the communion service, she seemed to know by instinct how to go through it.

And that one, in all the six weeks, was the only clue that he discovered: that she was, or had been, an Episcopalian.

Acting upon that discovery, he wrote a circular letter and sent a copy of it to every clergyman of that denomination in Greater New York, and to many in surrounding cities, asking them if they knew or had heard of a young woman who answered to Doris' description, who was missing, and he received replies by the hundreds, not one of which was at all satisfactory.

And so the six weeks passed without result, and Doris remained an inmate of his home, and be it said that she steadily endeared herself to them all, so that Nick began to be perfectly satisfied with the arrangement as it stood, and to dread the time when memory should return to her, and she would be torn by duty from her new home and friends.

Then came a day which brought with it a surprise, and also a glimmer—just the faintest possible one—of light concerning her.

It was Sunday morning, and, being stormy, they had decided not to attend church that morning.

Nick was reading the paper in his study, and Doris was snuggled into one corner of the great leather couch, looking at the pictures of the *Times* supplement.

The detective had pretty nearly finished with his paper, and had turned the pages until the society columns were before him, when his eyes fell upon a short article which bore the attractive heading, "Beautiful Doris."

Doris is not a common name at all, although many young women have borne it.

It therefore attracted him, and he read the article through to the end.

It stated somewhat briefly that Mr. and Mrs. John Aldershot had, on the preceding Friday evening, given a "coming-out" ball and reception to their beautiful young niece, Lady Doris Granley, daughter of the late Lord Herbert Granley.

The article went on to explain that the Countess of Granley, Doris' mother, had died at the birth of her child, and that her last wish had been that if anything happened to the father, Lady Doris should be placed in care of Lady Granley's only sister, Mrs. Aldershot.

It described Doris Granley as a young lady of eighteen who was wondrously beautiful, and who was also the heiress of untold wealth in lands and moneys. It described the function with great particularity and exactitude, of course, but that part of it did not interest the detective at all.

He could not have explained why any part of it did so; but, nevertheless, he read it over a second and a third time.

"It is all nonsense," he told himself. "There cannot possibly be any connection between the young Lady Doris Granley and our Doris. Now, if Lady Doris Granley were missing, it would be different, but, far from being missing, she was apparently very much in evidence."

"Hello!" he exclaimed suddenly, reading farther along in the article this time. "That is a remarkable coincidence, anyway."

The remarkable coincidence to which he referred was the statement that Lady Doris had arrived in America from her home in England, on the tenth of March; the afternoon of the beginning of the great blizzard, etc., etc.

The detective put the paper aside and sat still for a long time, studying Doris, who was entirely unconscious of his earnest regard.

Then suddenly he leaned forward, keeping his eyes fixed upon her, and in a low but distinct tone he uttered the one word:

"Granley!"

Instantly Doris started violently; the paper fell to the floor, and she stared, wide-eyed, into Nick Carter's face.

CHAPTER V.

THE DETECTIVE HAS A THEORY.

The detective was watching Doris narrowly when he uttered the name of Granley thus suddenly, and he saw, as plainly as he saw her, that the mere mention of the name had stirred some depth of memory of which she was at the moment unconscious.

If he had shouted, or had he even spoken with undue emphasis, it would have made no difference what word or name he made use of, the result would have been the same; but he had done neither. He had only mentioned that name in a subdued tone at a moment when her mind was applied to the examination of the pictures and was, therefore, in as passive a condition as might be induced.

And the effect had been even more than he had dared to anticipate.

She was startled. The paper had fallen unheeded from her grasp to the floor. She had flushed, then paled, and then flushed again, and now she was staring at him with dilated eyes and breathing as if she had been running to overtake him in the street.

He waited a moment, and then very quietly he asked:

"Does the sound of that name suggest any memories to you, Doris?"

She smiled rather wistfully as she replied:

"I thought it did, but now it does not. It was strange, though. When you uttered it so suddenly it seemed as if you called me—and then instantly I knew that you had not. Why did you speak the name so suddenly?"

He did not reply to her question, but, instead, asked another.

"Tell me exactly what the impulse was when you looked up so suddenly after I spoke the name," he said.

"Why, I think it startled me. I somehow thought that I should answer."

"And what was the effect upon you? What was it that flashed through your mind in that instant? Try and see if you cannot tell me that, exactly."

She laughed uneasily and again spoke wistfully, for she had become accustomed to Nick's frequent and unexpected attempts to make her remember.

"Tell me exactly what it was that rushed through your mind in that instant—and nothing more," he insisted.

"Many faces," she replied. "Hundreds of them. A church or chapel; a coffin—and that is all."

Her face had clouded, and now Nick, being more than satisfied by the answer he had received, laughed pleasantly and appeared to return to the perusal of his paper.

But she was not to be so easily put off.

"Tell me why you did it?" she asked. "Why did you use that name in the manner you did?"

"Only as an experiment," he replied. "Now go ahead with your pictures, and I will finish with my paper."

Silence fell between them again until at last Doris rose to leave the room; and, as she did so, Nick called to her to send Chick to him if he was in the house.

The moment she was gone the detective crossed the room to his book-shelves and took down a copy of Burke's Peerage, where he speedily found the name of Lord Herbert Granley, and by studying what was written there he quickly discovered that Lord and Lady Granley had had four children born to them.

Three were boys, and all had died in infancy; the fourth was a girl, named Doris, whose mother had died at her birth.

It was all the information the book could give him, and he had just closed it and returned it to its place on the shelf when Chick entered the room.

"I want to talk to you a little, Chick," said the detective. "I want you to help me think. I believe that I have fallen upon something very like a clue, although it is as yet so chimerical that at first blush it seems utterly preposterous."

"About Doris?" asked Chick.

"Yes."

He passed the society section of the paper over to the assistant, and, indicating the article that had attracted his attention, asked Chick to read it.

"Well?" asked Chick, putting the paper aside after he had read the article.

"Did you read it to the end?" asked Nick.

"Yes."

"Has any part of it impressed you?"

"There is the similarity of names; and there is the coincidence of date," replied Chick.

"Exactly," agreed the detective; and then he explained how he had sprung the name on Doris and what the effect had been.

"What are you getting at?" asked Chick. "A substitution of a false Doris for the real one?"

"Yes; something like that."

Chick shook his head.

"It doesn't seem logical," he said. "In the first place, you would have to have two young ladies of about the same age who look exactly alike. One would have to be an angel of goodness and the other a past master at deception and intrigue."

"I will grant you the latter half of your objection," replied Nick. "As for the first, it may not have been important that the two girls should be remarkably alike. A partial resemblance might answer just as well."

"How so?"

"Well, for one reason, Doris has just passed through the age—is still passing through it, in fact—when girls change mightily in their looks and appearance."

"What of that?"

"This: We will say for the sake of the argument that our Doris *is* the niece of Mrs. Aldershot, and that the young woman who 'came out' last Friday night is an impostor. We say it now only for the sake of argument, remember."

"Yes."

"Now, for the sake of the argument, let us suppose that three or four or five years have passed since Mrs. Aldershot has seen her niece. Suppose that the last time she saw Doris, the girl was somewhere between thirteen and fifteen years old? Eh?"

"Well?"

"In any event, after that lapse of time, the first remark that Mrs. Aldershot would make use of on seeing her again would be: 'Why, my dear child! How you have changed!' and a lot more like it. I think you appreciate that, don't you?"

"Perfectly; only we do not know that Mrs. Aldershot did not see her niece and pass much time in her company when she went abroad last summer."

"Certainly—provided that she *did* go abroad last summer."

"You have no reason to suppose that she did not."

"Neither have we any reason to suppose that she did, save just one: That it is the fashion for society to do so each year."

"Then according to your theory——"

"I have not yet said that it is a theory; it is really only a suggestion for a theory."

"Oh, well; anyhow, it presupposes a plot on the part of somebody to put an impostor in the shoes of Doris in order that the plotters may finger more or less of the immense fortune which will fall to Doris when she is of age."

"Exactly."

"And you cannot stop right there, can you, Nick?"

"Well, go on, Chick. I asked you to help me think, and you are doing it."

"So the two men, whose voices you overheard in the square the night of the blizzard, are the arch-plotters."

"Naturally—if there is a plot."

"Well, then, let us suppose a little further."

"Go on."

"If all that is at all tenable, why was it necessary that the real Doris should have been brought to this side of the water to get rid of her? Why did not the plotters dispose of her over there and thus save both trouble and expense?"

"There are several answers to that question, but I think that just one, which occurs to me now, will suffice."

"What is it?"

"There are a great many persons over there—all the servants on the estate, at least—who know Doris by sight. If she was brought away from her home and the country openly, and if a little later it appeared that she was safely at the home of her aunt, nobody would ever think of questioning the truth of her safe arrival here.

"Again, if there is such a thing as our being correct in this theory, the great blizzard happened very opportunely. And now, Chick, there is something that I wish you to do at once."

"All right. What is it?"

"I want you to lose no time in finding out for me what steamers arrived at this port on the day of the blizzard, and for two or three days prior to that date—it was the tenth—from England and Scotland, and I want you to bring me a complete passenger list of each one."

"That is easy."

"Sure. In fact, you need not bring me complete passenger lists. Look them over yourself, and copy only such names as you think will be interesting."

"Very good."

Chick was silent a moment, and then he said:

"There is one thing, Nick, which seems to go entirely against your theory."

"Well? What is it?"

"Doris doesn't talk like an English girl. She talks like an American girl."

"I have thought of that," replied the detective. "It is almost true, but not quite. It is true that she hasn't the singsong enunciation of the average English girl, and it is equally true that she has not precisely the matter-of-fact enunciation of the American girl. I have had the idea several times that she might be English."

"Still, I think——"

"Never mind about that just now. I have heard a good many English girls talk who did not sing their words. Doris may be such. I want you to find out what I have suggested, and, in the meantime, I will attend to another branch of the inquiry."

"It is too bad that the newspaper reporter who supplied that article did not procure a picture of the débutante."

"I think," said Nick slowly, "that it is rather significant that he did not. Anyhow, Chick, the more I think

about it the more satisfied I become that we have with us under this roof no less a personage than the young Lady Doris Granley."

"Gee! but that is a leap in the dark."

"All right. It is the only clue we have succeeded in obtaining, except the one other that satisfied us that Doris is an Episcopalian. That fits in nicely, you see, for the English Church is an Episcopalian church."

Chick started for the door, and there he paused.

"It will be rather a loss to all of us to find out who Doris really is," he said.

Nick nodded.

He felt exactly the same way about it, for Doris had already become one of the family, and the detective had already permitted himself to believe that he had a daughter, at last.

Fifteen minutes later, however, he had donned his hat and coat and was walking rapidly up the avenue toward a club-house in which he could find one man whom he particularly wished to see at once.

Entering, he made his way to the reading-room, and over in one corner, buried in a Sunday paper, he found the man—Lawrence—or Larry—Hamilton by name; and he drew up a chair and sat down beside him.

CHAPTER VI.

LARRY HAMILTON'S EVIDENCE.

"Hello, Larry," said Nick, as he seated himself in the leather-covered chair.

"Hello, Nick! Jove! Where did you drop from? I haven't seen you in an age. I thought you were dead—or something."

"Confess, Larry, that you haven't thought about me once since you saw me last," said the detective, smiling.

"Oh, well, you know, that is hardly the fact. But—Jove!—I do have a lot of things on my mind, you know—and it isn't exactly a weight-carrier at that."

"Cotillions, lists of invited guests and arbiter elegantiarum duties, eh?"

"Yes; about that; but it's devilish wearisome. What good angel dropped you in here to-day, Nick?"

"I wanted to see you, Larry."

Hamilton screwed his monocle into his right eye and stared unsmilingly at the detective.

"Who are you consulting, Nick?" he drawled. "It must be a serious case."

Nick laughed.

"Why so?" he asked.

"What the deuce could you want to see me about, you know? Ah? A feather-headed chap like me can't possibly be of any use in a man of affairs like yourself."

"You're not so feather-headed as you try to make people believe, Larry. I want some society information."

"Ah! Well, I guess I can furnish that. Had some of the four hundred been forging a check, or committing a murder, or running off with another fellow's wife? Eh?"

"No. I am not exactly tracking down a criminal."

"Glad of that, by Jove! What do you want?"

"Were you at the reception and ball at the Aldershots the other night? Friday, I think it was?"

"Eh? Sure. I never miss such things. Great blow-out it was, too."

"Could you give me a fairly good description of the débutante, Larry?"

"Eh? The débutante? The peerless Doris? No, Nick, I couldn't."

"Why not?"

"I haven't the art, the skill, the eloquence; and the English language doesn't contain the words; nor any other language that I happen to know, either."

"I suppose you mean by that that she is very beautiful?"

"Beautiful isn't the word, old man. There isn't any word that fits the case. She is the most ravishingly exquisite creature that was ever born into the world. By Jove, Nick, if I were only about fifteen years younger——" he sighed.

"What is her particular style of beauty?" asked the detective.

"I can't tell you that, either. It is a style that is all her own. It isn't in the least like any other that I ever saw."

"What color are her eyes?"

"Turquoise-blue; heaven's blue; the sort of blue that you see in the sky and water at Naples and sometimes at Bermuda."

"What color is her hair?"

"Spun gold; not the yellow gold of Alaska, but the red gold of California, as it was found in '49."

"How old is she?"

"Just past eighteen. But I say! What the dev——"

"Easy, Larry. Answer my questions, and, if there is any explaining to do, I will attend to it later."

"All right. You always were a puzzling chap, Nick. Fire away; I'll answer if I can, because I know you're a brick even if you are devilish inquisitive."

"I suppose there was a jam there, wasn't there?"

"Eh? Where? Oh! To be sure. Never saw such a crowd in my life, on such short notice."

"Short notice? How was that?"

"It was decided all of a sudden, I believe, to give the ball. It was at first thought to be out of the question, because the father of Lady Doris had not been dead quite a year. But Mrs. Aldershot overrode all objections. She always does. She's a brick, you know."

"She is also Lady Doris' aunt, is she not?"

"Yes. Doris' mother was her sister."

"And is Mrs. Aldershot an American?"

"Sure. She was a Denver girl. Lord Granley met her

sister out there when he was a younger son, and married her when he had no expectations of inheriting the title."

"So, Doris' father lived in this country for some time, did he?"

"Years, Nick, years. He was a cowboy on a ranch before he was twenty. Then he owned a ranch of his own; then two or three. Then he went into mining, and money just flowed into his fist. Then he married the elder Miss Martin—Doris' mother, you know—and about a year after that the title fell to him."

"Then he was really more of an American in his tastes, and, therefore, in his talk, than he was an Englishman, up to the time that he inherited the title, eh?"

"Decidedly."

"I have heard that the mother died when Doris was born."

"Yes."

"And Lord Granley, you say, died about a year ago."

"About that. Yes."

"I wonder how it happens that Lady Doris was not brought over here to her aunt sooner after the death of her father."

"Eh? I don't know. I believe it was something about finishing her school. But what——"

"Were there any Englishmen at the reception, Larry?"

"Eh? Yes. A lot of them. About all there are in the city at the present time—that is, of any account, you know."

"Of course. Could you name over a few of them to me, Larry?"

"I think so. There was the Marquis of Blair—Tommy Sloane, we call him—there was the Earl of Brimleigh, Sir George Carrington: I say, do you want the English women, too?"

"No; never mind the women. Go on with the men."

"I could remember the women a whole lot easier you know."

"I suppose so. But go ahead with your list."

"There was Jack Churchill—he's related to the Spencer-Churchills, I believe. There was Sir Eustace Kidder—and say, by the way, he is related to Doris somehow; a cousin of her father's, I think. Let me see; was there any one else? Oh, yes. Another distant cousin. What was his name? Ah! I have it. Sir James Bundy. I think that is all, Nick."

"Thank you. Did I understand you to say that both Sir Eustace Kidder and Sir James Bundy are distantly related to Lady Doris?"

"Yes; some sort of a cousinship, you know."

"Do you happen to know in whose company Lady Doris came across the ocean, Larry?"

"She came with Sir Eustace and Lady Kidder, I believe—on the *Baltic*. Then, of course, there were maids and what-not."

"Did Sir James Bundy happen to arrive on the same steamer, do you know?"

"No; I don't know. But my impression is that he came over before they did. I say, Nick, I'm beginning to get devilish curious about all these questions. What are you up against, anyhow?"

"My dear Larry, I am merely making a few inquiries in the interests of one of my clients, that is all. When the affair is all over, I will promise to tell you all about it. Will that satisfy you?"

"I suppose it will have to. Is there anything more that you would like to know?"

"Not much. Do you happen to know the Aldershots quite well?"

"More intimately than anybody else in New York. I think."

"Splendid people, aren't they?"

"The salt of the earth, Nick. Mrs. Aldershot is like an elder sister to me. Always has been, in fact."

"I suppose, like the rest of her set, she goes abroad every year? Eh?"

"That's where you are wrong, old chap. It's the only thing I've got against her. She does not like the water, and she will never make one of my yachting parties. Would you believe it? She has never been to Europe but once in her life, and she came near staying there that time."

"How was that?"

"It made her so frightfully ill that she almost died. She swore she would remain there until an all-rail route was built, or till she could come home in a balloon, but they did finally persuade her to undertake the voyage home. You'd laugh to hear her describe that voyage. She almost died, and the extent of her water trips since that time is to cross the North River on a ferry-boat."

"Indeed. How long ago was all this?"

"It was six or seven years ago."

"So when Lady Doris came here it had been six years since she had seen her niece?"

"Yes; or seven. I don't remember which."

"Lady Doris is an heiress, isn't she?"

"I should say so! One of the largest and finest estates in England, to say nothing of half a dozen ranches and as many mines in our own country. And in addition to that, there is another fortune coming to her from her mother, which will have more than doubled itself by the time Doris is twenty-one."

"Is she altogether as charming as she is beautiful, Larry?"

"Who? Doris? Of course she is."

"You say that rather strangely, Larry. I take it that she is not."

"Oh, dash it all, I didn't mean that."

"What did you mean?"

"Well—er—for a girl who is fresh out of school she

impressed me as being a little too—er—up to snuff, you know. Last Friday night was her introduction into society, but you would have thought that she was an old hand at it; that she had been in the thick of it for years. Gee! I ought to be kicked for saying that, Nick."

"Not at all. I understand you thoroughly. Now I want to ask you about two people who were at that reception. That is, I want your impressions about them."

"Who are they?"

"First, Sir Eustace Kidder. What did you think of him?"

"Eh? I don't remember that I thought anything about him at all. He's a sort of a little, blue-eyed, washed-out nonentity of an English fop. A typical ladies' man—the sort that the ladies haven't a bit of use for, you know."

"Young?" asked Nick, laughing at the description.

"No. Forty, or near it, I should say."

"And Sir James Bundy? What of him?"

"He's a different breed of cats. He is big and handsome and strong; a steeplechaser; a gentleman sport; a high roller. I should say; rather a good fellow. I've no doubt; black eyes, black hair, heavy black mustache; big white teeth, and the sort of man whom you would rather have for a friend than an enemy."

"And would be better pleased if he were neither? Eh?"

"Yes. That is about the answer."

"Is there a Lady Bundy?"

"There was—once, it seems; but she isn't in evidence."

"Now, Larry?"

"Yes?"

"I want you to think of a function that is coming off soon, to which you can take me, and where I can meet all these people we have mentioned."

CHAPTER VII.

THE TRAIL OF AN IMPOSTOR.

For a moment Hamilton sat staring at the detective with a strange expression on his handsome face; and then, with quiet decision, he said:

"Nick, we have been friends a number of years, and I know you too well to harbor even the faintest idea that you would do anything that was not entirely honorable, or that you would ask me to do such a thing; and you know me well enough to know that there isn't a place in the world where I go, or a house where I am in the habit of calling to which I would not be glad to take you with me and make you one of us. But, all the same, Nick, you have asked me a number of very remarkable questions, and now, coming on top of the questions as it does a somewhat startling request; so I reply to it in just this way:

"I am no good on earth at half-confidences. I will do exactly what you ask, provided that you will tell me with entire frankness exactly why you wish me to do it. Let's have a cigar while we talk. Here; try one of these."

They lighted their cigars in silence, and then Nick said:

"It is a long time since you have been inside my house, Larry."

"What the dev——"

"My coupé is at the door. It is storming outside, to be sure, but, all the same, I would regard it as a favor if you would ride down to the house with me."

"All right. I suppose you prefer to tell me the story there, eh?"

"Yes; I prefer to tell you the story there."

"And show me the exhibits, eh?"

"Yes; one exhibit, at least."

"Is it a serious story, Nick?"

"Yes. Quite a serious one."

"About—er—Lady Doris?"

"We will not begin on the subject until we are prepared to go through it to the end, Larry, if you don't mind."

"Not in the least, if you will give it all to me."

"I will give it all to you as far as I know it—but there must be a pledge of absolute secrecy."

"Of course. That goes without saying."

When they arrived at the detective's home, he paused just outside the door, and said to Hamilton:

"Larry, if you see or hear anything that surprises you during the next hour, I don't wish you to express that emotion, either in your expression or your manner. Come in."

The detective conducted his friend straight to his study, and then he rang the bell.

"Joseph," he said, when the summons was answered, "I wish you would ask our young lady to come to me here. Tell her that I wish to make her acquainted with a friend of mine."

"Yes, sir."

Joseph withdrew, and five minutes later Doris entered the room.

Nick was watching Hamilton narrowly as she approached them across the floor, but he did not appear to do so; and it was evident, too, that if Hamilton felt any of the emotion of surprise, he remembered Nick's caution and effectually concealed it.

The detective stepped forward to meet her at once, and he said:

"Doris, I want to introduce you to a very dear friend of mine—Mr. Lawrence Hamilton. Larry, this is my ward, Miss Doris—Carter."

Hamilton rose and made his best society bow, and Nick could see that he was studying Doris' face narrowly.

"Have you been long in New York, Miss Doris?"

Hamilton asked with that easy grace for which he was so well known among his fellows.

She started slightly, and blushed; and Nick hastened to reply for her.

"Doris has been with me between six and seven weeks," he said. "I want you to come often to see us while she remains here, Larry, for it is my intention to let her see something of the social side of New York, if it is possible. What were you doing, Doris, when I sent for you?"

"I was reading in the library."

"Well, I sent for you to ask you if you would make a cup of tea for us in the library. We will come down to drink it with you in about half an hour."

When she had left the room Nick turned to Hamilton again.

"What do you think of my ward, Larry?" he asked.

"I think she is the most beautiful child I ever saw," was the instant reply.

"More beautiful than Lady Doris Granley?"

"Yes. It is an entirely different kind of beauty, though. This is a child; the other is a woman."

"They are both eighteen."

"Humph! Your Doris could pass for seventeen; Lady Doris would have no difficulty in convincing anybody that she is twenty, or even twenty-one."

"They both have eyes like the blue of the Mediterranean; they both have hair like spun gold from California," remarked Nick dryly.

"That is true, too; but there is a difference."

"What is it?"

"The eyes of your Doris are like the sea when it is calm and unruffled; her hair is like the gold-dust when it is washed in the miner's pan. In the eyes of Lady Doris, the sea is troubled with unrest, and the gold of her hair has been beaten and wrought by the hand of man. That is the difference."

"The difference of worldliness and unworldliness eh?"

"Something like that—yes."

"Is there any resemblance between them?"

"Yes—and no. One might in some way remind you of the other. That is all."

"How would you find that reminder? In manner? In attitude? In motion? In speech?"

"Certainly not in speech. Lady Doris is pronouncedly English in her speech. She is taller, too, and heavier than this girl—since developed. I don't know that I can say just why one might remind you of the other, and yet it is so."

The detective was silent a moment, and then he said:

"Larry, I have got a story to tell you. It is the story that you wished to hear. I want you to listen from the beginning to the end without comment, if you will."

"I will."

"If you feel any surprise at what I shall say, keep it to yourself until I have finished my tale."

"I will."

"You remember, of course, the day of the blizzard?"

"Certainly. I should say I do remember it. It began soon after four in the afternoon."

"Yes. My story has to do with some incidents which happened in connection with that blizzard."

"Fire away, old chap."

Nick began then with his arrival at the Pennsylvania Station in Jersey City, and he told his friend everything that happened to him from that moment until his arrival home with Doris in his arms, not neglecting to put especial stress upon the names of the men he had overheard talking together in the storm.

Next he went into the history of Doris herself as he knew it, from the time of her arrival at the detective's home, and he told everything there was to tell, just as we know it.

And in bringing the recital to a close he did not mince words, for he said:

"And now, Larry, I have no proof whatever of what I am about to say. It is at present no more than an idea, or, at best, a vague theory; but, all the same, and particularly since I have talked with you, I have arrived at the conclusion that Lady Doris Granley has just left this room, and that the Doris you met at the home of your friends is an impostor. Now, my friend, you have got the whole story."

Hamilton had remained immovable throughout the recital. His face had expressed nothing. Now, with a shrug of his shoulders, he asked:

"Supposing your theory to be correct—I cannot yet see any possibility that it is—but, suppose it is, I don't suppose for a moment that you think Mrs. Alderson has anything to do with it, do you?"

"Emphatically, no."

"You attribute it all to Sir James Emsly—the Jim of your story—and to Sir Rupert and Lady Eldorf, because he would be the 'Kid' of your story, and because

they—the last metioned—came over in the ship with Doris. Eh?"

"Precisely."

There was another silence, and then——

"Nick," said Hamilton, "I used to know Lord Granley very well indeed. I never saw his daughter while he was alive."

"Yes?"

"This Doris of yours has no English accent in her speech—or, at least, very little."

"I know that."

"Lord Granley had none."

"So I understood you to say while we were at the club."

"This young lady, who is in your care, possesses one gesture which is almost precisely like one that Lord Granley frequently used."

"Indeed! What is it?"

"A mannerism of throwing back the head and turning it a little to one side when at loss for a word, or for just the correct thing to say. Your Doris was distinctly at a loss for words when she was introduced to me. She used that gesture. I noticed it."

"Anything more, Larry?"

"Yes. She looks like Lord Granley—about the chin and mouth. He was a very handsome man, you may have heard."

"I have no doubt of it if Doris resembles him. How about the other Doris? Doesn't she also look like him?"

"I had not noticed it. Possibly she does, only I did not happen to see it. I did see a resemblance here."

"Do you mean that you are beginning to embrace my theory, Larry?"

"No. Not yet. Let me ask you a few questions."

"Certainly. Go ahead."

"If this should turn out to be the real heiress, who is the other girl?"

"Possibly the daughter of Sir Eustace Kidder."

"No. Lady Kidder herself told me that they were childless."

"Then of Sir James Bundy and his mysterious lady."

"That is more likely; only Sir James is very dark."

"His wife may be a pronounced blonde."

"That is true enough. But if it should all be so, how in the world did they work the changes on the aunt and uncle? How did they manage to impose upon everybody in such a barefaced manner?"

"We cannot answer those questions understandingly as yet. But you must not forget that according to your own story, Mrs. Aldershot has not seen her niece since the child was eleven or twelve or thirteen years old. Girls change greatly in their appearance between those ages and eighteen or nineteen."

"Yes. But——"

"And the girl they introduced to Mrs. Aldershot as her niece came over with them. An impostor would be the very last thing in the world that Mrs. Aldershot would be expecting. It would not be a difficult game to play at all, under the circumstances."

"It's a strange business," said Hamilton, shaking his head.

CHAPTER VIII.

NICK CARTER'S CLEVER LITTLE SCHEME.

"There is another thing," said Hamilton, after a pause.

"What is that?" asked the detective.

"How do you account for this strange forgetfulness on the part of your—ward?"

"I don't account for it; I cannot."

"She seems to be perfectly normal in every other way."

"Entirely so."

"It is hardly supposable that there is a drug which would steal away her memory so entirely, and still have no other effect upon her, is it?"

"It doesn't seem so."

"She seems to be in perfect health."

"Yes."

"You have had the very best physicians, of course?"

"Stag—and others of his selection. I think it is the private opinion of all of them that she is shamming."

"But such an idea is preposterous."

"Certainly."

"Has her head been examined for evidence of a blow that she might have received?"

"Yes; none has been found."

"Could the exposure of that terrible night have been the cause of her condition?"

"Stag does not think so. The other doctors did not think so."

"And you?"

"I don't know what to think."

"Is she always as sweet and lovely as we saw her just now?"

"Always the same."

"I'll tell you what I think about it, Nick."

"What? I wish you would do so."

"Mind, I am not speaking as if she were indeed Lady Doris. I haven't accepted that theory yet."

"I understand."

"I am referring merely to her mental condition."

"Yes."

"I don't think that she is suffering from the effects of a drug that has been administered to her in any form."

"Well?"

"Nor do I think that her condition is the result of a blow."

"Nor I. What do you think?"

"It is my opinion that she has lately passed through a severe illness which has left her without a memory."

The detective was thoughtful and did not reply.

"I don't remember that I ever told you," continued Hamilton, "but I am a graduated physician—graduated from two colleges in this country, and one in Germany. I never practised, because I didn't have to, I suppose; or because I was too lazy. But I have always kept up my studies and kept pace with the times in my profession, because it has more interest for me than anything else."

"Unless it is a cotillion," said Nick.

"I am speaking seriously, old man. I mean it."

"I believe you; go on."

"The nervous system is my hobby. The average physician would call me a crank on the subject."

"I haven't a doubt of it."

"It is well known that scarlet fever and kindred diseases will leave the system in a depleted condition. Deafness, blindness, impediment of speech, and various other ills result from it frequently."

"Yes; I know that."

"Such conditions can only be the result of a disease, because that disease had affected certain qualities of the brain. The brain is the engine-room of the entire system."

"Well?"

"I think that this case is one where the memory is affected. Memory, to my mind, is as much a sense as hearing, feeling, tasting, touching, or smelling."

"I quite agree with you there, Larry."

"If we could only get a little of this child's history——"

"If we could do that we would not need to be asking ourselves these questions at the present moment."

"True enough."

"Look here, Larry. I've got an idea."

"Let's hear it, Nick."

"You are almost as well known in London society as you are in New York, aren't you?"

"About the same. Yes."

"Haven't you got a friend over there to whom you could cable this afternoon?"

"Sure. Any quantity of them. But what am I to cable about?"

"About Lady Doris. The real Lady Doris, I mean."

"Eh? What about her?"

"Ask for full information about her. Ask where and under whose care she has been since the death of her father. Ask what Sir James and Sir Eustace have had to do with her. Ask what were the relations—personal relations, I mean—between those two men and Lord Granley. Ask for a full description of the girl. Ask for a photograph of her if one is procurable. Tell your friend to get the best man he can find at Scotland Yard to assist him in making the necessary inquiries. Tell him to spare no expense and to cable the reply if it takes ten thousand words to do it, but to make it complete. Ask him to include as much of a record of Sir Eustace and of Sir James as he can get hold of. I particularly wish to know about the financial standing of each of them. Ask him also if he has ever known of another Doris in the family; or of a girl who at all resembles the young Lady Doris. Can you remember all that?"

"Yes."

"And have you a friend over there who can be relied upon to attend to it for you?"

"I certainly have. Just the fellow, too."

"Draw up at that desk over there and write out your cable. I will send it to the office at once."

"We might telephone it to the cable office."

"I would rather send the written copy, for many reasons."

There was a long silence after that, while Hamilton was writing the message and Nick was plunged in thought; and the message was just completed when there came a gentle tap upon the door.

Nick opened it and found Doris there.

"Your tea is ready," she said.

"Thank you, dear. We will be down in ten minutes. Will that be soon enough?"

"Yes," she replied, and went away again.

"Here is the cable," said Hamilton, turning in the chair as Nick reclosed the door.

The detective read it carefully to the end, made a few interpolations, and then rang the bell.

"Is it all right?" asked Hamilton.

"It is a masterpiece of conciseness and brevity," replied Nick. "Joseph, is Ten-Ichi down-stairs?"

"Yes, sir."

"Give this to him. Ask him to make a careful copy of it, and then to take it at once to the cable office, and personally see that it is sent off as soon as possible. Now, Larry," he added, when the door had closed again.

"Yes."

"What do you say about that suggestion of mine?"

"I think it is excel——"

"Nonsense. I don't mean the cable."

"What do you mean?"

"I asked you before we left the club if you would take me to some function where I could meet all these people who interest us just now."

"Oh!"

"What do you say to it?"

"Why, I will do it, of course."

"When? How?"

"I'll tell you what, Nick. I have just been painting my bungalow, out on the Nob road; it isn't very far from Mamaroneck, you know."

"Yes."

"I have been thinking of asking a lot of my friends out to see it. In fact, they have all been boning me to do it for a long time. Now the roads are in good condition if the weather is somewhat raw, so how would it do to have an automobile party, say Tuesday—the day after to-morrow—and have the whole bunch out there?"

"It is just the thing, Larry."

"I will make it a luncheon party, and——"

"Why not to-morrow? The weather may change before Tuesday, and, besides, I would like to have it over as soon as possible."

"Isn't the time rather short?"

"No. Not if you send out your invitations at once. You can invite whoever you please, of course, but the only people I am interested in are those whom we have mentioned since we have been talking."

"I see. You want Mrs. Aldershot—Aldershot himself couldn't go on a business day, but you don't need him."

"No."

"Mrs. Aldershot and her niece, Doris; Sir Eustace and Lady Kidder; Sir James Bundy and somebody for a companion. Who else?"

"That is all who particularly interest me."

"I'll have to invite a few others, of course."

"Naturally."

"How will you go?"

"In my own car, and under the name I have used in society before."

"In that make-up of yours as Felix Parsons?"

"Yes. Doris will pass as my daughter, Miss Parsons."

"Great Scott! Do you intend to take her?"

"Certainly."

"By Jove, Nick!"

"What?"

"I'll do it. Consider it settled."

"For to-morrow?"

"Yes. We'll start from the Netherlands Hotel at eleven o'clock. You can fill up your car with another couple if you like. But suppose this storm lasts, eh?"

"It won't. It was clearing when we came in."

"Then you'll be on hand?"

"I will. And now come along. Let's go down and drink that tea."

"Go on. I'm with you."

CHAPTER IX.

WHERE THE PLOT THICKENS.

It was apparently an unusually merry party which started out from the Netherlands Hotel soon after eleven o'clock the following day for Lawrence Hamilton's bungalow near Mamaroneck.

Men and women were alike wrapped in furs and provided with masks and goggles to protect them from the biting wind.

Nick Carter was among the last to arrive at the rendezvous, and he had already warned his friend that he did not wish to encounter any introductions until after the party had arrived at its destination.

So neither he nor Doris received any notice at that time.

The party arrived at the bungalow before one o'clock, and shortly after they were all exclaiming together over the beauties of the place.

Nick was "Mr. Felix Parsons," a friend of Hamilton's.

He was just sufficiently disguised so that if there should be one there who had ever known him as Nick Carter, there would be no recognition. It might have been said that he resembled the great detective, but nothing more than that.

As Felix Parsons he was introduced to the company; and then, with apparent surprise, Hamilton inquired:

"Where is your daughter, Mr. Parsons? She came with you, did she not?"

"Certainly," replied Nick. "She was here a moment ago. Ah! Here she is, now. Doris, come here, please."

The detective's eyes were upon the two men who interested him as he pronounced the name and as Doris came forward from an embrasure near the fireplace, and he watched them with every sense alert.

He saw, or fancied that he saw, a slight contraction of the muscles around the eyes of Sir James Bundy; but he was in no doubt about the start that Sir Eustace Kidder gave upon the simultaneous pronouncing of the name and the sudden appearance of Doris. Nick had schooled her thoroughly in the part she was to assume as Miss Doris Parsons, and he felt no fear of her.

The group of people was in the wide reception-hall of the bungalow, and they stood in almost a circle in the middle of the room; so it happened that as Doris came forward she penetrated directly to the center of that circle.

Mrs. Aldershot stood at Nick's left. Hamilton was at his right. Lady Doris was directly opposite and was flanked on either side by her kinsmen—the two men already named. Lady Kidder stood beside her husband.

As Doris entered the group, she was presented first to Mrs. Aldershot; then to Lady Doris, and then to the others; but the presentation was not finished before Hamilton exclaimed:

"By Jove, Parsons! But that's strange. Eh? Have you noticed it?"

"Noticed what?" asked Nick, smiling.

"Why, Lady Doris Granley and your daughter not only bear the same name, but they look enough alike to be own cousins; eh?"

"It is quite true," exclaimed Mrs. Aldershot.

She stepped nearer to the girls and looked first upon one and then upon the other. Then she stood them side by side, with the remark:

"Stand there together, young ladies. I want to look at you. Really! Upon my word! There is a resemblance."

She turned toward Nick. "I don't suppose you have any relatives in England, Mr. Parsons?" she asked.

"Not that I am aware of," replied Nick, smiling.

During this episode the detective had not lost a trick, so to speak.

Without in the least appearing to do so, he had kept his eyes busily engaged in covering the faces of those who would be interested in the incident, and he saw enough to satisfy him that, at least, three persons in that company were strangely affected by what had occurred.

The watery, Bright's-disease complexion of Sir Eustace Kidder had become many shades paler than usual, while the face of Sir James Bundy had taken on a dark-red hue which was almost apoplectic in appearance.

The third one—Lady Kidder—had made only one effort to conceal her emotions, and that she did by turning hastily away and seeking a chair without making any excuse whatever for her act.

As for the fourth, who should have, perhaps, been more interested than any of the others—we refer to the so-called Lady Doris—she never turned a hair.

Her face was as smiling and serene as a summer morning. Her eyes were as calm as if they were engaged in studying her own reflection in a mirror. Her smile was as bewitching as it could be, and her manner was the perfection of exquisite grace and pleasure.

"Come," she exclaimed laughingly, to Doris Parsons, as she was known just then, "let us escape from this admiring throng. I don't care to stand here and have things said about me; do you? Let us see what Mr. Hamilton's library is like. I think it must be over there."

They moved away from the group together; and this was exactly what Nick had hoped for.

He turned to Mrs. Aldershot who was again at his side, and whose face was flushed a little, he thought; and he said lightly:

"I don't notice such an extraordinary likeness between the two girls, madam; do you?"

"N-no. There is a likeness, however. But——"

"You were about to say, madam?"

"Really, Mr. Parsons, I am greatly puzzled. I am very foolish, too, I suppose. I wish you would tell me more about your daughter; that is, about her mother. Will you?"

Nick noticed that Sir James had drawn near to them, so that he could hear every word that was said without appearing to do so; and purposely inducing a suggestion of coldness into his voice, he replied to her:

"May I ask why, madam, since you do not notice such an extraordinary resemblance between the two girls?"

"I beg your pardon, sir," she said hastily. "I spoke without thinking. But now I will explain. I asked the question because I noticed an extraordinary resemblance between your daughter and my sister—when she was about the age of your daughter. It seemed to me for a moment almost as if Connie was here with me again, just as she used to look when she was a girl."

"Indeed, madam! It is very strange."

"Isn't it? I have already told my niece—Lady Doris, you know—how much she looks like her mother, but——"

"Your sister was Lady Doris' mother?"

"Yes. I was about to add that even she does not resemble her own mother—that is, she does not remind me of her, as your daughter does."

"Oh, well," said Nick, smiling. "It is one of those strange resemblances, I suppose, which cannot be accounted for. When we come to think of it, it is even stranger that we do not all look alike. What do you think about it, Sir James?" he asked, turning suddenly to the man who stood near to them.

Sir James was not expecting the question, and he jumped; for he had intended that they should not notice that he had been listening.

However, he pulled himself together, and replied:

"The girls look somewhat alike, to be sure. Same eyes, same hair, and all that, you know; but I see nothing so very extraordinary in that. All girls of that age, when they are of the same type, look more or less alike. I will say, however, that I knew Lady Granley very well, and I do not notice the slightest resemblance to her in your daughter, sir."

Sir Eustace joined the little group now, with a smirking smile on his pale face, and, before Nick could respond, he said:

"Deuced funny, deuced funny, that anybody should think these girls look alike, don't you agree with me, Mr. —er—Parsons?"

"Quite," replied Nick. "By the way, Sir Eustace, is your wife ill?"

"Yes. The ride out here quite did her up. Hamilton has just succeeded in inducing her to lie down a few moments. She'll be all right again presently. Do you reside in New York, Mr. Parsons?"

"Part of the time," replied Nick evasively.

"You and Hamilton are old friends, I suppose? Eh?"

"Quite so."

Sir Eustace hurried away, and Nick saw him approach Hamilton a moment later.

"It is as plain as day to me now," the detective told himself; "but the question is, how am I to prove it in default of Doris' memory?"

"Hamilton has a fine place here, Mr. Parsons," Sir James said to him at that moment, and at the same time Mrs. Aldershot moved to the opposite side of the room.

"Yes," Nick agreed. "He certainly has that."

"I suppose that you and your daughter are frequently guests here, eh?"

"No; this is my first visit to this place, although we know each other well."

"Indeed! By the way, I hope you don't take amiss what I said about all girls looking more or less alike. Your daughter is really very beautiful."

"Thank you. Yes; I think she is beautiful; and quite like her mother used to be."

"Her mother is not living, then?"

"No; her mother is dead. She died when Doris was born."

"Ah! Sad! Very! Ah, here is Hamilton. I say, Hamilton, old chap, haven't you a peg around here somewhere? That ride gave me quite a thirst."

"My dear fellow! Haven't you had a drink yet? Right in the next room, on the sideboard. I would join you, only I see Mrs. Aldershot calling me. Perhaps Parsons——"

"Excuse me," said Nick. "Doris is beckoning to me;" and Nick hurried into the library.

"Wait a minute, Hamilton," said Sir James, as Nick moved away. "Mrs. Aldershot can stand it for a moment without you, eh? That Parsons chap, now; eh? Fine chap; no?"

"Decidedly. One of the salt of the earth."

"Quite so. Quite so. Known him always, I suppose, eh?"

"Almost always—yes."

"And his daughter, too, eh?"

"Well, no. To tell you the truth, Sir James, I never knew until the other day that he had a daughter."

"Eh? Impossible! How is that?"

"I don't know. She hasn't been much with him, I suppose."

"Mother died at her birth. I suppose that accounts for it; eh?"

"Very probably."

"Ever know the mother, Hamilton? Eh?"

"Doris' mother? Yes. I knew her before she married, and I saw her once or twice afterward, but that is all."

"Never knew there was a daughter, eh? That's strange. But I say, I'm forgetting that peg. See you later."

They parted, and Hamilton started across the room toward Mrs. Aldershot, but half-way across he was waylaid by Sir Eustace.

"I say, Hamilton, where's Jim?" he asked, with some excitement in his voice.

"Gone into the dining-room to get a drink. You look as if you needed one, too."

"I do for a fact. I'll chase him," and he hurried away after his kinsman.

Hamilton stood looking after him, when Nick came up.

"Sir Eustace and Sir James are about to talk things over a bit, Nick," said the host. "I don't mind telling you that I would give a thousand to hear what they say to each other."

"Where are they?" asked Nick. "In the dining-room?"

"Yes, but they won't remain there. Keep an eye on them, Nick."

CHAPTER X.

NICK CARTER FOILS A DESPERATE PLOT.

The detective sauntered slowly past the open door to the dining-room, where he could see that the two Englishmen, each with a well-filled glass at his elbow, had seated themselves in one corner of the room, and were talking earnestly together, apparently oblivious to their surroundings.

Nick did not loiter in the doorway; he merely glanced toward the two men, but in that momentary vision he noticed that Sir Eustace seemed to be greatly perturbed, and that even Sir James appeared to be ill at ease—and he smiled as he passed on.

"I've got them on the run, anyhow," he told himself thoughtfully. "I have thrown a bomb into their camp by bringing them face to face with Doris. They don't know what to think. It is impossible for them to understand what it means—and I don't blame them for being puzzled."

He paused outside the library and took a turn up and down the wide veranda.

"If they had encountered Doris under any other circumstances," he continued his thought, "they would have known positively and at once that she is the same Doris whom they abandoned in the snow; but as it is, introduced here as my daughter—as Miss Parsons—they do not know what to think. They are up in the air, to put it figuratively.

"Poor Lady Kidder couldn't stand the strain of it; the shock was altogether too much for her, but that girl who is playing the part never turned a hair. She is the strongest and most self-reliant one in the bunch, and therefore their next move will be to consult her."

He returned to the interior of the house, and went again to the library—and he found Doris alone.

She was seated in one corner, almost hidden among a pile of cushions, and she appeared to be thinking deeply.

"Well, dear?" he said to her, dropping down beside her. "Tell me what is on your mind."

She looked up at him and smiled rather sadly.

"I am trying to remember," she said.

"Trying to remember what?" he asked.

"There are faces here I have seen before," she replied, "and I am trying to recall when and where I have seen them."

"How many faces?"

"Three."

"Tell me which ones, Doris."

"The girl whom they say I look like; and the two Englishmen."

"Never mind them for the present. Tell me, instead, what passed between you and Lady Doris Granley."

"Nothing much. She asked me a great many questions, however."

"Such as—what? Give me an idea what they were."

"She asked my age, where I live, where I had been to school, if I had ever been in England, what your business is, if I had ever met Sir James or Sir Eustace before, if I knew Mrs. Aldershot before I met her to-day, if we were old friends of Mr. Hamilton—and a lot more of that character."

"And how did you reply to all those questions, my dear?"

"I told her that I was eighteen, that my schooling had been accomplished mostly under governesses, that you had been in England often, and that you had the habit of taking me with you wherever you went, that I knew nothing about your business affairs, that I could not re-

member that I had met either of the Englishmen before, that I did not know Mrs. Aldershot until I was introduced to her to-day, that you and Mr. Hamilton were very intimate friends, and I replied to the rest of her questions in about the same manner."

"Capital, Doris. You did splendidly."

At that instant he saw that Lady Doris was returning, and he added hastily:

"She is coming back here. I think she will sit down with us. If she does, I wish you to wait just a moment and then start away suddenly, as if somebody called you. Leave us together."

And so it was that two minutes later the detective and the pseudo Lady Doris were alone together in that retired corner.

"Really, Mr. Parsons," she began, "I think you have the most charming daughter. I do wish that we might know each other a great deal better. And it is so strange, too, is it not, that we should not only possess the same given name, but that there should be a noticeable resemblance between us."

"Yes," replied Nick. He chose to appear rather stupid for the moment.

"I wish you would give me your address in the city. It would give me great pleasure to call upon my namesake."

"Thank you," replied Nick; but he did not mention the address. He chose to mystify her the more by not doing so. And for an instant she did look rather blank, and she did not press the question.

"I suppose you are quite familiar with my country," she said presently.

"Yes, indeed," he replied at once.

"Do you know Granley Court—my home?"

"I have never visited it, if that is what you mean."

"It is a grand old place, Mr. Parsons."

"I haven't a doubt of it."

"I hope some day, when I return, to have the pleasure of entertaining you and your daughter there, sir."

"It would be a very great pleasure to both of us," replied Nick. "Do you return soon?"

"Oh, no. Not until after I am twenty-one."

"Ah."

"Then, of course, I shall return."

"For your inheritance, I suppose?"

"Naturally."

The butler entered the library at that moment to announce that luncheon was served, and so they went out together.

And for the balance of the time spent at the bungalow there was nothing more that happened which is worthy of record here, save one incident which occurred at the moment they were entering the automobiles for the return trip.

Nick had lingered behind for a moment, in the doorway, when he saw Sir James beside the car he had driven out, engaged in a laughing expostulation with Doris; and at the same instant the baronet lifted her clear of the ground and almost by force seated her into the front seat beside the one he was to occupy himself; and Sir Eustace, with Mrs. Aldershot, were already inside the tonneau.

The detective stepped forward quickly, for he scented danger instantly. He saw in the act an agreed-upon plan between the two baronets by which at a given signal the machine was to be wrecked. He believed that they had agreed to take desperate chances. That at the signal they were to jump, trusting to luck and their own ability to escape injury, and in the hope that in the accident Doris would be killed, and possibly Mrs. Aldershot as well.

So quickly did Sir James move that he was in the act of turning on the power when Nick reached the side of the car, and, knowing that it might leap away from him, he reached out his hand and pulled the spark-plug from its place.

"Pardon me, Sir James," he said to the astonished baronet. "I think I should have been consulted about this arrangement. Doris, you will ride home with me, child. Get down, please." He was at the opposite side of the car and therefore could not assist her to alight, but she obeyed instantly, and sprang to the ground.

Bundy gave a short, uneasy, and rather harsh laugh, but he controlled himself admirably.

"My dear chap," he expostulated, "you have stopped my engine."

"I will crank it up for you again, with pleasure."

"We were merely trading our Dorises for the ride home," continued the baronet. "I have told my cousin to get in with you."

"I shall be delighted to have her company," replied Nick, still speaking coldly.

"But won't you permit your daughter to ride with us?"

"My daughter, Sir James, has been separated from me so long a time that I do not like to permit her out of my

night. She only came home the night of the great blizzard—and I came near to losing her then."

Sir James flushed, and then, with some show of petulance, he exclaimed:

"Do you mean to say, sir, that——"

"Pardon me again, Sir James. All that I mean to say is that my Doris rides home with me."

"Lady" Doris was already seated in the tonneau of Nick's car, and now he helped his own charge in beside her; then springing into the seat under the wheel, he was the first to move away from the door.

"I nipped that little scheme in the bud, anyhow," he thought, as he drove from the grounds to the highway and turned the car toward home; and then a plan occurred to him which he decided instantly to carry out.

He knew that his own car was the fastest of them all, and so the moment he struck the highway he put on all the power, so that they shot at a frightful rate of speed along the road. But he kept a close watch ahead of him, and whenever he saw another conveyance of any sort, or even a pedestrian along the road, he slowed down until he had passed them.

In this manner it was not long before he had left the other cars far in the rear, and so it was that he ran into the street of the city fully half an hour ahead of them.

Then he slowed down and turned to speak to the young woman behind him.

Doris was laughing in high glee, but Lady Doris was pale and frightened.

"Do you always drive like that, Mr. Parsons?" she demanded, with just a show of anger.

"Not always," he replied. "I happened to remember that I am expecting an important cable-message at home, and I have been hurrying to get it. You will not mind stopping for a moment at my door, will you?"

"No; not at all," she replied. "But you frightened me, sir."

"I am very sorry. It was thoughtless of me."

In the cable which Hamilton had sent to his friend in London he had directed that the reply should be sent to him at Nick Carter's address, and although it was too much to expect a complete reply to their questions, Nick thought it possible that some sort of acknowledgment might have been received. If it was there, he wished to see it at once.

The young ladies resumed their talk together now, and Nick gave his entire attention to guiding the machine until they drew up before his own door, and he sprang out.

"You may both remain in the car, if you will," he said. "I won't be a moment, and then I will drive you around to Mrs. Aldershot's."

He hastened into the house—and he found a message awaiting him.

It was this:

"Can't give full particulars yet. What already know, follows. Doris under care Sir Eustace Kidder and wife since death of father. Very ill after father's death. Only recently recovered. Left for New York with Kidders about first November. There now. Kidder and Bundy no good. Sports. Gamblers. Both broke. Up to ears in debt. Granley hated both. Can't imagine how Kidder got charge Doris. Don't know of any other Doris in family, or of girl resembling her. More to-morrow, or day after. FAIRBANKS."

The detective folded the message and put it in his pocket, after which he returned to the car; and as he entered it the pseudo Lady Doris asked, with some eagerness:

"Did you receive your cable, Mr. Parsons?"

"Yes," he replied, "but it was unsatisfactory"—at which reply he thought that a gleam of satisfaction shot from her eyes.

But he made no remark, and presently he stopped the car before the door of the Aldershot mansion.

CHAPTER XI.

THE WAY OF THE TRANSGRESSOR.

At half-past eight o'clock that same evening Nick Carter was seated in his library with Doris, and they were smilingly going over the incidents of the day. Lawrence Hamilton and Chick were also there, when Joseph entered the room and gave a card to his master.

The detective glanced at it, started slightly, frowned, and then smiled.

"Where is he, Joseph?" he asked.

"In the clients' reception-room, sir," was the reply.

"Good. Say that Mr. Carter will be there in a moment, and do not reply to any questions he may ask you."

As soon as Joseph disappeared, Nick turned to his companions.

"Guess who is in the reception-room waiting to see me," he said.

"One of the baronets," replied Hamilton.

"Bull's-eye the first shot. Now, why is he here? Do you suppose that they have tumbled to the relationship between Felix Parsons and Nick Carter?"

"I don't," replied Chick. "I think it more likely that, finding they were up against it, he has come here to engage your services—at a price, believing that you have one."

"Possibly. But 'Lady' Doris knows the address."

"Ten to one she hasn't mentioned it."

"Maybe not. Wait here. I will slip into a disguise and go down to see Sir James."

Ten minutes later Nick Carter entered the reception-room, but nobody would have recognized him as the same man who left the library a few moments earlier. He was now a portly, middle-aged gentleman, with a bunch of iron-gray whiskers on his chin. He held the card in his hand and read from it as he entered the room:

"Sir James Bundy?"

"Yes. Are you the detective?"

"I am Nick Carter. What can I do for you?"

"A very simple and, I suppose, for you a very easy thing to do."

"What is it?"

"I wish to know, as soon as possible, all there is to know about a man in this city named Felix Parsons; and, more particularly, I want to know all about his daughter, Doris Parsons."

"Eh? Felix Parsons? The capitalist? Smooth-shaven? About my build, but not so stout? Owns a big Peerless touring-car? I know him."

"You do? What do you know about him?"

"Nothing whatever to his discredit, if that is what you mean."

"What do you know about his daughter?"

"Never heard that he had a daughter," was the calm reply.

Bundy's face twitched, and he drew his chair nearer to the detective.

"That is just the point," he said, in a somewhat lower tone.

"What is?" asked Nick.

"The daughter. I want to know all about *her*."

"But, if he hasn't got one——"

"That is just the point again. He claims that he *has* a daughter. I want to know if the girl *is* his daughter."

The detective scratched his head meditatively.

"What is it that I have heard somewhere about that daughter business?" he seemed to ask himself. Then he brightened, and added: "Oh, yes. I know now."

"Yes? What is it?"

"Heard he had adopted a daughter lately."

"Ah!"

"Found her in the snow, or something, the night of the blizzard. Yes; that is it. I remember now. Something the matter with her. Don't remember her name, or where she lived, you know, and all that. Very beautiful girl. Parsons took pity on her and adopted her—or intends to do so. Calls her his daughter already. Humph! Funny that it had slipped my mind."

"But how does it happen that he calls her Doris?" demanded Sir James impetuously.

"Haven't an idea, my dear sir."

"Did you say that he found her in the snow?"

"So I have heard."

"Where?"

"Madison Square, I believe. Not sure."

"Do you think that you could find out any more of the particulars about her, Mr. Carter?"

"Sure. Dead easy."

"Will you undertake to do so?"

"Certainly—for a price."

"How much?"

"Hundred dollars down and bills payable on presentation."

"All right. Here is your hundred. When may I have a report?"

"Some time to-morrow. What is your address?"

"Hotel Mammoth."

"Eight o'clock to-morrow evening, then. I guess may be this hundred will cover it. Anything more?"

"No; only I want the report complete, sir."

"It will be."

When Nick returned to the library he had removed the disguise, and he was laughing.

"That chap isn't smart enough to be even a first-class criminal," he said. "Here, Doris, is a hundred dollars which belongs to you."

"To me?" exclaimed Doris. "How is that?"

"I cannot explain just now, more than to say that the man who gave it to me is using your money—as you will know as soon as we find that memory of yours."

"I hope I will never find it if the discovery will separate me from you," she said; but Nick uttered an impatient "Hush, child!" and a silence followed.

After a moment Nick related all that had taken place in the reception-room, and they all enjoyed a hearty laugh over it; but they could not know that Sir James Bundy went directly from Nick Carter's house to the residence of Mrs. Aldershot, where he held an interview with the young woman who was posing as Lady Doris Granley; and we are permitted to look in upon that interview, because later the facts about it became known to the detective.

The two were alone, for it happened that Mrs. Aldershot had gone out without her niece that evening.

"I have just engaged the services of the best detective in New York," he told her, as he seated himself.

"Yes? Why?"

"I wish to find out all about that other Doris, that's why."

"But, Sir James, we know all about her already. There is no doubt at all that she is Doris Granley. But the great thing about it is that nobody suspects it."

"I'm not so sure about that."

"I am. Who is this detective?"

"Nick Carter."

"Where does he live?"

Sir James mentioned the address, and instantly his companion leaped to her feet with a cry of dismay.

"What is the matter now?" he growled.

For a moment she did not reply to him, but sat staring into his eyes with white face and trembling limbs. Then, very slowly and with considerable effort, she said:

"The address you have mentioned is the same to which Mr. Parsons drove me in his automobile and left us waiting while he went inside to get a cable-message. Don't you see, you big fool? Felix Parsons is Nick Carter! *Felix Parsons is Nick Carter!*"

Sir James leaped to his feet, swearing like a pirate, and his companion continued:

"Doris has remembered enough to give him a clue to the facts. That is why they were at the bungalow this afternoon. Oh! oh! oh! Why don't you do something, Jim Bundy? Don't you realize that the prison doors are standing wide open to receive us unless we do something at once?"

"What is there to do, Madge?" he demanded.

"*Die!* There is only one thing to do, man. Nick Carter must not live to see another sunrise."

Sir James shuddered. "And Doris? What of her?" he asked helplessly.

"We will care for her later," was the savage response.

"But how——"

"Leave it to me, you fool. Leave it to me. Go to your hotel and stay there, but keep in evidence all night if you can. You will need an alibi."

An hour after midnight that same night the false Doris Granley crept stealthily from the Aldershot residence—and she wore masculine clothing.

CHAPTER XII.

A DESPERATE UNDERTAKING.

We will follow for a little while the young woman whom Sir James had addressed as "Madge," and whom we now know had been masquerading as Lady Doris Granley.

Nobody not being posted concerning the facts would have believed that she was a woman, when she issued so quietly from Mrs. Aldershot's residence and took her way silently and swiftly along the street, for not only was her costume masculine, but she acted the part perfectly, slouching along close to the palings, with a cap pulled well down over her eyes.

She continued rapidly on her way to Nick Carter's house, and, watching her opportunity, she glided into the area beside the front steps and leaned up against the grating of the basement entrance.

Here she produced a bottle of acid and a saw—a very small steel saw, made purposely for cutting metal. Five minutes later she reached her slender arm through an opening she had made, sprung the catch of the iron-grating door, passed inside and closed it softly after her.

Here more tools from her pockets were in requisition, and presently there was a round hole through the wooden door of the basement, through which she thrust her arm again. It was all very simple to one as expert as she was proving herself to be.

She closed this door behind her also, and produced a light, with which she found the way to the parlor floor; and here she paused for a long time to listen, after which she crept softly up the stairway to the second floor.

She opened one door very gently, after first oiling the hinges. It admitted her to the detective's study and, seeing that nobody was there, she backed out again upon the landing.

She approached a second door, which was open, and passed inside; and, listening, she could hear somebody breathing gently. She held a short, iron bar in her right

hand, and with it raised above her head she approached the bedside and dared to touch the button of her light.

It shone upon the face of Doris—but it also awakened her instantly; and she had time to start from her recumbent position and to scream while the iron bar was descending upon her.

The blow fell, however, and it struck her directly on the top of her head, instead of across the forehead, where it was aimed, and she sank back with a low moan and lay motionless and still.

But that scream had alarmed the household, and the intruder knew it.

With a cry of anger, she leaped away, plunged through the doorway into the hall, vaulted the balustrade, alighted on the third stair from the bottom, rolled over and came up standing on her feet, like a cat, wheeled and fired a revolver pointblank at a figure that was already in pursuit of her.

She saw the man fall—heard him groan. Then she took the remaining balustrade at a leap, as she had done in the first instance, and alighted squarely on her feet in the basement hall.

In an instant she was outside the house; in another she was running rapidly through the street—and since she had entered the house a thick snow had begun to fall. This deadened the sound of her running as well as hid her from view, and in a few minutes she had turned a corner.

After that she walked quietly along the streets she followed, presently attracting herself again to the house of the Aldershots—and in half an hour from that time she was again arrayed in full feminine costume—and a traveling costume at that. Her blond hair was covered by a jet-black wig, she darkened her brows and did many other things to alter her appearance; and then she did a strange thing.

She tumbled her room until it was in the utmost disorder. She tore some of the bedclothing and also her night-dress. She made it appear that there had been a terrific struggle in that room. She packed a bag with jewels and valuables; she crept into Mrs. Aldershot's room and pushed some jewels and some money. She broke open Mr. Aldershot's desk and found still more, which she appropriated. She descended to the butler's pantry and pushed a heap of silverware into a table-cloth, which she left where she arranged it. Then she pulled open a window to indicate where burglars had entered the house—and then she seized the bag and passed quietly through the front door into the street, and disappeared.

* * * * * * *

It was Chick who fell when the woman fired her pistol. It was he who groaned, but it was because he had turned his ankle, not because the bullet hit him, which it did not.

That she escaped we already know.

Nick had not sought to pursue the intruder. He had heard Doris scream, and he hurried to her bedside.

She was lying there, unconscious, but breathing heavily, and he called Jannette at once to her aid.

Doris' hair was very thick and long, and when she retired at night she was in the habit of arranging it at the top of her head, and the blow, which otherwise would have crushed her skull, had fallen upon a soft cushion of hair, which protected it.

Nevertheless, she remained a long time unconscious, and when at last she did open her eyes it was to stare wonderingly around her into the faces that were bending over her. Doctor Stag was one of these, and Nick Carter stood beside him.

"Why! Where am I?" she exclaimed. "What has happened? How did I come here? *Oh!*"

She covered her face with her hands, and Doctor Stag turned a significant glance upon the detective. Then he murmured:

"That blow has accomplished what my science could not do, Nick. Memory has returned to Doris Granley. Am I correct, child? You are Doris Granley?"

"Yes," she murmured. "But what has happened? I seem to be somebody else, too."

"Does your head pain you, Doris?" asked Nick, bending nearer to her.

"No;" she smiled up at him now. "It feels a bit strange. I was very ill. I—oh, I remember everything now. It all comes back to me. Sir Jim and Sir Eustace and Lady Kidder came to stay with me when I was getting better. They treated me like a child. I could not remember who they were. But I do remember that they brought an actress who was said to look like me. Her name was Madge Morley. She was a concert-hall actress. I did not know her when she was brought to see me, but I remember her now. Then we went away somewhere. They told me that my aunt in New York had sent for me. We crossed the ocean. There was a terrible storm when we arrived in New York. I was

lost in it somehow. Sir Jim struck me and threw me down in the snow. Then"—she looked at Nick—"you came to me, for next I was in this room. It is all very clear to me now. What was the matter? Had I lost my memory?"

"Yes," replied the physician.

"And why does it all return to me now?"

"The result of an accident, my child. I am going to give you something to make you sleep now. Will you try to sleep?"

"Yes," she replied.

Nick Carter, the doctor, and Chick repaired to the study and seated themselves; but only for a moment, for Nick started to his feet and exclaimed:

"Come, Chick. We must go to the Hotel Mammoth at once."

"Do you think that the burglar was Sir James?" asked the doctor.

"It was one of that outfit. Anyhow, I want Sir Jim and Sir Eustace."

"What do you suppose he came here for, if it was him?" insisted the doctor.

"I should say that the reason is very plain. The purpose of the visit was to murder Doris—and me."

"It wasn't either of those men," said Chick, nursing his ankle. "The fellow wasn't tall enough. I am afraid Nick, that my ankle won't take me to the hotel to-night. I turned it badly."

"I forgot about the ankle, Chick. I'll go alone;" and before either of the men could remonstrate, he was gone.

It was after daylight when he arrived at the hotel, where he told the clerk who he was and asked for the number of Sir James' room.

On his way through the corridor of the tenth floor, toward the room, he passed a black-haired woman who was arranging a veil over her face, and who carried a black satchel with her disengaged hand; but he did not notice her more than to see that it was a woman.

Presently he rapped against a door, and a voice from the inside bade him enter. It was the voice of Sir James, and Nick did enter.

The instant he did so, there were three cries of alarm from the occupants of the room, and three people—two men and a woman—leaped behind a table that stood in the centre of the apartment. They were Sir James Bundy, and Sir Eustace and Lady Kidder; and they were dressed for the street, while scattered about them was every preparation for a sudden flitting.

"It seems that I am just in time," said the detective dryly. "Where is the other interesting member of your conspiracy? Where is Madge Morley?"

"She just left us," replied Bundy, with a strange smile on his face. "You must have passed her in the hall. We thought she was returning when you rapped."

In that instant Nick regretted that he had not brought somebody with him to the hotel.

But he only smiled, and said:

"Let her go for the present. I can find her when I want her. And now I will trouble you people to hold out your hands."

He took one step forward, but came to a sudden halt, for Bundy exclaimed:

"Stand where you are, Nick Carter, or, by Heaven, I will blow this party into hell together! Look, you fool, and you can see that I mean it! Look!"

Nick did look.

He understood now why the three conspirators had jumped behind the table when he appeared so suddenly upon them. There was an open suit-case upon the table, and Bundy was holding a small electric battery in his right hand. An insulated wire led from that battery into the suit-case, which the detective could see was packed half-full on one side with long, yellow sticks which he at once recognized as dynamite.

Bundy was grinning horribly at the detective. Kidder was trembling violently, and the woman was plainly on the point of collapsing with terror.

"You understand?" grinned Bundy.

"Yes," replied Nick. He was thinking rapidly.

"One step nearer and I touch this button. You know what that would mean."

"Yes."

"Will you make terms with us, Carter?"

"What terms?"

"You know the game now. You have got the real Doris. We want forty-eight hours to get away. We will take your word for it."

"Forty-eight hours," repeated Nick. "That sounds reasonable."

Sir James Bundy's grin softened into a smile. For an instant he forgot himself and allowed his hold upon the electric battery to relax.

"You agree?" he almost shouted.

The answer was a flash and a report apparently from Nick Carter's sleeve and a yell of rage and pain from the baronet.

The bullet had pierced his wrist.

The electric battery clattered to the floor, and Nick Carter leaped forward, seized the suit-case from the table, dropped it gently behind him, and in another instant he had handcuffs on the wrists of Sir Eustace and was pointing a revolver at Sir James Bundy's head. Lady Kidder was stretched on the floor in a dead faint.

"It is all over, I think," said the detective quietly. "You played your game very badly, Sir Jim. Sing Sing prison will do for you, for a time, unless the English authorities want you for a greater crime."

* * * * * * *

"To think," said Mrs. Aldershot that same evening, while seated in her own parlor with Nick Carter, Doctor Stag, Chick—whose ankle was better—and Doris, "just to think that I could be so easily imposed upon. But something in my heart told me the truth when I saw you at Larry Hamilton's bungalow, Doris. Mr. Carter, do you think you will find Madge Morley?"

"I'm not going to try," replied Nick.

"No? Why not?"

"She has left the country, without doubt. I think she is harmless, now."

"I wish I thought so, too," said Mrs. Aldershot; "but somehow I do not."

"Well," said the detective, "Doris is happy, anyhow. That is enough for the present."

"Yes," replied Doris. "I am very happy. Happier than ever before in my life, and you know why;" and she looked shyly at Nick.

"Sure!" he said. "You have found another father; eh?"

THE END.

The next issue of this weekly, No. 518, will contain "A Dangerous Woman; or, Nick Carter Faces a Crisis."

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